

WHY IS MARRIAGE IMPORTANT?

“Marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values.”¹

Sex and Society

Marriage is both a public and sacred institution. It is not just between the husband and wife. It serves as the foundation of the family, which protects the rearing of children and serves as the basic building block of society. The well-being of society is directly related to the well-being of the family, which is founded on marriage. Marriage is God’s plan for the sexual union of man and woman so that we might have stable homes where we can be *“fruitful and multiply”*² and be happy in a committed relationship. Jesus told us that marriage comes from God who, at the beginning of creation, created us male and female.³

God who is love, created us out of love to reflect the goodness of his love. He is the author of human love and sexual intimacy. It was his idea! He does not condemn the act of premarital sex because sex is bad, but because it is so good and sacred that we must not distort or cheapen its beauty! Sex is sacred because it reflects something of the very nature of God, who is a loving communion of persons in the Trinity.

The world around us tells us it is ok and even good to have sex outside of marriage if you love someone. Jesus taught us that if you love someone truly, you will only engage in the marital act (sex) within the committed relationship of marriage. Sex outside of marriage serves to weaken the institution of marriage, upon which our society is built. Even secular research shows that premarital sex results in higher divorce rates.

Why does the Church care about how whether people are married or not?

The church cares about this because it affects the wellbeing of our spouse and our children, our happiness in this life, the good of society, and our eternal salvation. Jesus gave the apostles and their successors his authority to teach us how to follow the laws of God in all areas of our lives, including marriage (see Mat. 28:18-20).

Sex outside of marriage is unfair to the children who long for a stable home with a father and mother. Having children outside of marriage creates a hardship for the parent (usually the woman), who has to raise the children as a single parent.

True love, of a romantic nature, leads one to make a gift of one’s self in a life-long commitment of marriage, before engaging in sexual intimacy. Sex is merely the expression of the consummation, or “sealing” of this commitment in the language of the body. Engaging in the marital act before you are married is, in effect, declaring a full commitment with your bodies that you have not yet made in a public ceremony. The message of sexual intimacy is that you are giving yourself completely to your partner. Sex outside of the commitment of marriage is then, a lie, spoken through the language of the body. True love is not conditional or temporary, but rather, proves itself in faithful, self-giving sacrifice. The unconditional love we long to receive from another is the love that we should be prepared to give.

Sex and Salvation

¹ Pope Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (1981), 1.

² Gen 1:28

³ Jesus said: *“Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”* (Matthew 9: 4-6; also see Gen 1:26-28)

Simply put, sex without commitment is not true love, but rather the using of another person for selfish indulgence. This is condemned by God in Sacred Scripture, which says:

“Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us... But fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you... Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” Ephesians 5:1-5 (Also see: Matthew 15:19-20; Revelation 21:6-8; Galatians 5: 13-25; Colossians 3: 5-8, 12-15)

It is no act of love to lead one’s “lover” into mortal sin. Fornication leads to the spiritual death of both one’s self and one’s “lover.” It is no act of love to lead someone into spiritual death and possible eternal damnation. Rather, this is an act of profound selfishness, to seek gratification at the expense of another’s soul, as well as your own. St Francis de Sales wrote: “The friend who would lead us into sin, has become our enemy.”

Acts 15:28-29 speaks of our need to refrain from “*unlawful marriage*” as a requirement for salvation.⁴

Sex and the Sacraments

Those who are living in an invalid marital union, having relations as husband and wife, are forbidden by the Church from receiving Holy Communion or any other sacraments, until their marital state is reconciled with the Church.⁵ The reason they may not receive Holy Communion is that they are not living in a state of grace. This is not a mere technicality! Those who deliberately choose to live outside of a state of grace, when they know they are living in rebellion against God’s Commandments, cannot go to Heaven. This is because they are living in a state of unrepentant mortal sin.

Mercy and Reconciliation with God and His Church

Jesus did not come to condemn us in our sin, but to show us the way to life and happiness! He came not for the righteous, but for sinners. (Matthew 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32) Jesus was merciful toward the woman caught in adultery. And while he did not condemn her, he did instruct her to go and sin no more. (John 8: 3-11) Jesus wants to deliver us from a life of sin and show us the path of authentic love, so that we can know his abundant life (John 1:10). But we condemn ourselves if we refuse his mercy and are unwilling to experience the change of heart that will lead to a change in how we live.

The Catholic Church, in obedience to God, has laws concerning marriage and obliges her members to follow them.⁶ *“The Church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled.”*⁷ 1 Corinthians 7:39 speaks of our obligation to be married “*in the Lord.*” The Catholic Church understands this to mean a religious service according to the laws of God. Catholics who disregard the laws of the Church regarding marriage and get married without following them, place themselves in an invalid marriage and are therefore no longer able to receive the sacraments of the Church until this situation is reconciled.

Catholics who find themselves in this state should speak with a priest about how they can reconcile their situation so that they may again receive the sacraments.

⁴ The Apostles had to settle a question about what was required for salvation. Their decision included refraining from unlawful marriage as one of the things that was required for salvation. The decision was presented as having divine authority and was binding on all Christians.

⁵ An exception is made for one who is in danger of death, if they are sorry for their sin and willing to amend their life. In this instance, they may receive sacraments.

⁶ See Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraph 1630-1637.

⁷ Pope Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (1981), 3.